

President Lynch's Idea of the Greatest Player



Two of the season's diamond sensations, whose playing the fans held in contempt only a short time ago. The large figure is that of pitcher Rube Marquard, of the Giants, whose historic record of consecutive victories has made his name permanent. The other is Fred Merkle, National league president Lynch's idea of the greatest player in the game today.

head of this young gentleman after he failed to touch second base in that memorable game of 1908. The tell you. Not one in 10, no, not in 50. You cannot find many better first basemen today than Merkle. Why? Simply because he realized his mistake and decided to live it down by deeds of worth. He didn't sulk. He didn't slouch. He held a high head and kept a stiff upper lip. And instead of worrying over that one mistake as most fellows would have done, he profited by his experience and let it stand as a warning. His game improved. He was a far better first baseman in 1909 than in 1908; far better still in 1910. This year he is among the best in the game. I take my hat off to Merkle. He's the proper stuff. He'll be better still in 1912.

And Tom Lynch Knows.

Tom Lynch comes pretty near to knowing what he's talking about before he ever expresses himself. It is very doubtful if there is a first baseman in the game more valuable than Fred Merkle. There are flashier players. Hal Chase and Jake Daubert, possessing more natural advantages in that they throw left handed, appear a bit more graceful, perhaps. Yet it is doubtful if either has anything on the Giant as a fielder. Merkle is not showy. But he is wonderfully sure and as expert in making pickups off mean bouncers as ever the great Chase. He covers as much ground as Hal, is as skillful a base runner and a more dangerous hitter. He is a trifle less agile and cannot go so high for strong arm peas, nor is he so dexterous with the mitt hand. But Merkle is the only right handed first baseman who can break up a sacrifice hit play almost as cunningly as either Chase or Daubert.

No one versed in baseball will deny that Merkle ranks among the first three baseball's first base guardians. That is an honor indeed for a youngster that the fans were trying to hound back to the brush four short summers ago. But then he was unfortunate; simply the victim of circumstances. Had Mike Donlin, Arthur Devlin, or the great Matty been on first when Al Bridwell knocked out the clean single that should have won the game, little would have been thought of the veteran's oversight. The fact that it was a recruit gave the knackers a chance. Or if New York had won the play off with the Cubs, as they should, Merkle's lot would not have been so hard in 1908.

As a matter of fact, both McGraw and Mathewson were as much—yes even more—to blame than Merkle. He was a raw recruit, in the big show for the first time. He had come up to one of the greatest managers and one of the best teams in the profession from the then obscure Southern Michigan league. Most of the season he had spent on the bench, studying Fred Tenney's style of play. When Tenney's underpinning went to the bad the "kid" was called upon. Now when Merkle pulled his oversight Matty was coaching at first base and McGraw at third. When Bridwell went to bat with two out, Merkle on first and McCormick on third, there was identical the same situation as the one at Pittsburgh 10 days previously when Johnny Evers and the Cubs tried to win over the Pirates on the same sort of technicality. Indeed, if the subsequent play had been rehearsed it could not have been better played into Chicago's hand.

Chicago Tips Its Mitt.

Chicago lost its protest over Pittsburgh's victory because Hank O' Day who was umpire in chief that day, had failed to note whether or not the runner did touch second. Now, Chicago had certainly tipped its mitt by the action it raised over Pittsburgh's triumph. What excuse, then, could New York offer for not being on the alert. Is it not reasonable to suppose that the coaches, McGraw and Mathewson, were caught napping just the same as was Merkle? It is quite true that the Giants were entitled to the pennant save for a little technicality. Yet technicalities have lost empires as well as pennants and ball games.

That was a painful afternoon for McGraw, Mathewson, the Giants and in particular Fred Merkle. Yet in the case of Merkle it perhaps was one of those rare blessings in disguise; McGraw stuck by the boy and gave him every encouragement. And Merkle understood that his chief was depending upon him to make good in spite of the crowd and whist out the stigma of Giant carelessness. That one slip all up has been a beacon to Fred Merkle. It has fired his zeal when ever it gave evidence of flagging. So far as he is concerned, perhaps it was well that he did neglect to touch second. The pennant of 1908 is of little concern to the champions of 1912. And you may bet that Merkle nor any of McGraw's disciples will repeat such neglect in the world series battles this fall.

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